

Friday's Feature**By****Theresa Friday****January 1, 2007****The 2007 Plants of the Year**

The Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) recently announced their 2007 selections for Florida Plants of the Year. The Florida Plants of the Year program is designed to promote the use of superior and proven Florida plants.

The Florida Plants of the Year program promotes the use of under-utilized, but proven, Florida plant material. Ornamentals are selected on an annual basis by a group of growers, horticulturists, retailers, landscape professionals, and University of Florida faculty.

For 2007, five plants were chosen: four from the landscape selection of shrubs, trees, ground covers, vines and perennials/bedding plants and one selection representing foliage. The selections represent the diverse cross section of plant categories as well as geographic diversity.

Several of the selections are more suited for warmer climates but a few can be grown successfully in our local landscapes or used as houseplants.

With striking bright glossy lustrous lime green leaves, Limelight Dracaena is ideal for home or office settings. Known botanically as *Dracaena deremensis* 'Limelight', this plant can be used as an exterior plant in South Florida. Along the Gulf Coast this plant should be considered for an interior plant. Reaching a height of about five feet with a four foot span, this tropical foliage plant is very durable.

The holly fern, or *Cyrtomium falcatum*, is hardy in North Florida. This low-growing clumping evergreen fern sports fronds with holly-like leaflets. Holly Fern is a shade loving plant requiring ample moisture for best performance in the landscape. Its erect and spreading glossy, dark green fronds arise from a central crown.

The cardboard palm, also known as *Zamia maritima* (formerly *furfuracea*), is an exotic looking plant. Green cardboard-like fronds make this plant a stand-out in the landscape. New growth appears as light olive above the mature dark green leaves. This cycad is drought tolerant and tolerates neglect well. Its use adds a tropical flair to virtually any landscape. It is exceptionally salt tolerant and tough making it ideal for use in coastal regions.

Galphimia gracilis or the Shower-of-Gold plant is a drought tolerant shrub with blue-green foliage. *Galphimia gracilis* is loaded year-round with yellow clustering flowers growing up to an inch in diameter. This plant was formerly assigned the genus *Thryallis* and many times is referred to as such. The plants are long-blooming, easy-to-grow, and fast-growing; thrive in full sun and like ample room to grow. Branches are brittle, so use in areas where traffic is minimal. To maintain a great-looking plant, prune one to two times annually. This plant varies in size but usually reaches six feet by four feet.

Purple Lovegrass is a perennial ornamental grass. *Eragrostis spectabilis* is distinguished by its purple spikelets. This Florida native perennial grass tolerates Florida dryness and the rainy seasons without browning out. Its flat blades grow four to twelve inches long and in the late summer many flowers appear followed by persistent seed heads. The stems are round and hairy giving the plant an overall casual appearance adding an unusual flair to landscapes.

For a list of nurseries that carry these plants, visit the FNGLA website at <http://www.fn gla.org/PlantsOfYear/download/2007-PlantsofYear.pdf>.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>